

Message Text

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ORIGIN INR-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SSM-03 CIAE-00
DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-12 OMB-01 IO-13 /110 R

DRAFTED BY INR/RNA/NE:AAVACCARO:MP
APPROVED BY INR/RNA:PGRIFFIN
SSM:JTM Candrew
DESIRED DISTRIBUTION
SSM

-----038169 180630Z /10

P 172316Z MAR 78
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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 523 - MARCH 17, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. ISRAEL-LEBANON. ISRAELI FORCES THIS MORNING CONTINUED THEIR ATTACKS ON PALESTINIAN POSITIONS IN SOUTH LEBANON. FIGHTING WAS REPORTED IN THE VICINITY OF TIBNIN IN THE CENTRAL SECTOR, QANTARA AND THE MARJAYOUN/ARQUOB REGION. AT THIS TIME, IT SEEMS TO REMAIN AN OPEN QUESTION AS TO WHETHER ISRAELI FORCES INTEND TO STOP THEIR ADVANCES. DESPITE WEIZMAN'S AND GUR'S COMMENTS LATE WEDNESDAY THAT THE OPERATION HAD ESSENTIALLY BEEN COMPLETED EXCEPT FOR MOPPING-UP ACTIONS, INDICATIONS ARE THAT ISRAELI FORCES HAVE CONTINUED TO MOVE FORWARD ON THREE FRONTS--NORTH OF BINT JBAYL IN THE CENTRAL SECTOR, WEST FROM TAYYIBAH TOWARD QANTARA, AND IN THE ARQUOB TOWARD HASBAYYA.

2. THE ISRAELI OBJECTIVES ON THESE FRONTS SEEM TO BE TO CAPTURE, OR POSITION THEMSELVES SO AS TO INTERDICT MOVEMENT TO AND FROM, THREE KEY PALESTINIAN STRONGPOINTS:

(A) TIBNIN, NORTH OF BINT JBAYL.

(B) GHANDURIYAH, JUST WEST OF QANTARA; THE PALESTINIANS HAVE LONG HAD ARTILLERY POSITIONS IN THIS VICINITY FROM WHICH THEY COULD SHELL NORTHERN ISRAEL.

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(C) HASBAYYA, IN THE CENTRAL ARQOUB.

3. IN THIS VEIN, OUR TEL AVIV DEFENSE ATTACHE NOTED THAT THE PALESTINIANS FIRED SEVERAL SHELLS THIS MORNING ON NORTHERN ISRAEL, WHICH COULD PROMPT FURTHER IDF MOVEMENT FORWARD IN THE SOUTH. THE CONTINUED SHELLING OF NORTHERN ISRAEL MAY BE A PRINCIPAL FACTOR IN THE FURTHER ISRAELI ADVANCES. ISRAELI OFFICIALS HAVE SAID EARLIER THAT, SHOULD THE PALESTINIANSHELL THE NORTH OR ISRAELI TROOPS IN THE SOUTH, THEY WOULD MOVE TO PREVENT IT; POSITIONS NEAR TIBNIN AND GHANDURIYAH COULD BE USED AS FIRE POINTS TO FORCE PALESTINIAN ARTILLERY IN THESE AREAS TO PULL BACK. THE FIGHTING IN THE HASBAYYA AREA RAISES THE POSSIBILITY THAT SYRIAN TROOPS COULD BECOME INVOLVED.

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4. REACTIONS. ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, THE UN ARAB GROUP REACHED NO DECISION YESTERDAY REGARDING THE TIMING OF CALLING FOR A SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING ON THE SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION, OUR UN MISSION REPORTED. THE GROUP WILL CONVENE AGAIN TODAY AT 1030 EST AND COULD ASK FOR A SC SESSION AS EARLY AS THIS AFTERNOON SINCE ARAB THINKING

SEEMS TO BE TO MOVE QUICKLY TOWARD A SC MEETING.

5. EMBASSY BEIRUT REPORTED THAT A TOUR OF THE AL-AWZAI AREA OF THE CITY BOMBED BY ISRAELI JETS WEDNESDAY INDICATED THAT THE BOMBS HAD FALLEN IN THE MIDDLE OF A POOR RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD INHABITED BY A MIXTURE OF PALESTINIANS, LEBANESE AND KURDS. WHATEVER ISRAEL'S INTENTION IN THE RAID, THE EMBASSY COMMENTED, THE RESULT HAS BEEN THE KILLING AND INJURING OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS, WHICH HAS SIGNIFICANTLY DIMINISHED IN LEBANESE EYES THE ISRAELI JUSTIFICATION FOR THE INTERVENTION IN THE SOUTH.

6. EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT SADAT YESTERDAY CONDEMNED THE ISRAELI INCURSION INTO SOUTH LEBANON. HE WAS QUOTED AS
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SAYING ALSO THAT EGYPT "REJECTS ISRAEL'S SECURITY THEORIES BASED ON THE OCCUPATION OF LAND AND THE VIOLATION OF OTHERS' SOVEREIGNTY". SADAT CALLED A MEETING OF EGYPT'S NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL TO DISCUSS THE ISRAELI ACTION. EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS, EMBASSY CAIRO REPORTED, BLAME BEGIN'S INTRANSIGENCE AND THE INABILITY OF THE US TO SOFTEN ISRAEL'S POSITION FOR THE CURRENT SOUND OF VIOLENCE. PALESTINIAN FRUSTRATION IS UNDERSTANDABLE IN THIS CONTEXT, THEY ARGUE; MOREOVER, THEY POINT TO THE TERRORIST RAID ON ISRAEL LAST WEEKEND AS PROOF THAT, CONTRARY TO ISRAEL'S THINKING, THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM MUST BE RESOLVED IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A DURABLE MIDEAST PEACE. DESPITE GROWING PESSIMISM OVER PEACE PROSPECTS, THESE OFFICIALS REMAIN COMMITTED TO THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS, THE EMBASSY SAID.

7. THE SOVIET UNION REACTED OFFICIALLY YESTERDAY TO ISRAEL'S INVASION OF SOUTH LEBANON WITH AN AUTHORIZED TASS STATEMENT IN WHICH THE USSR "RESOLUTELY CONDEMNS THE ARMED INVASION OF LEBANON BY ISRAEL" AND "CALLS UPON ALL WHO CHERISH PEACE TO JOIN THEIR EFFORTS SO THAT ISRAELI AGGRESSION BE ENDED AND ITS TROOPS BE IMMEDIATELY WITHDRAWN FROM LEBANON'S TERRITORY." TASS ALSO INSISTED THAT "THE WHOLE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DANGEROUS CONSEQUENCES OF THE FRESH AGGRAVATION OF THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION IS BORNE BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL."

8. WE NOTE THAT THE TASS STATEMENT CONFINES ITS CALL FOR REACTION TO THE POLITICAL ARENA. IT AVOIDS ANY HINT THAT THE USSR WILL RESPOND ACTIVELY TO THE ISRAELI INCURSION, AND IMPLICITLY INDICATES A SOVIET DESIRE THAT THE FIGHTING NOT SPREAD. AT THE SAME TIME, THE OPERATIVE PARAGRAPH OF THE STATEMENT READS LIKE, AND IS PROBABLY INTENDED TO BE, THE OUTLINE FOR A SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION WHEN
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THAT BODY TAKES UP THE ISRAELI ACTION. IN THAT CONNECTION
WE NOTE THAT THE STATEMENT FAILS TO CALL FOR OR MENTION
A CEASEFIRE AND CONDEMNS ISRAEL WITHOUT REFERENCE TO
PALESTINIAN ACTIONS. (SECRET) VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, COMBAT OPERATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE069553
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: AAVACCARO:MP
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X2
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780120-0570
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780353/aaaabskx.tel
Line Count: 179
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 1fac7cc4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN INR
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 02 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3286069
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INTSUM 523 - MARCH 17, 1978 LONDON FOR KINSOLVING PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
TAGS: PINR, MOPS, EG, IS, LE
To: SINAI
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/1fac7cc4-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014